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PERSONAL NARRATIVES:
Third Series, No. 7.

Service with Battery F, First Rhode Island Light
Artillery, in North Carolina.
PHILIP S. CHASE.

PERSONAL NARRATIVES
OF EVENTS IN THE
WAR OF THE REBELLION,
BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

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PROVIDENCE:
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SERVICE WITH BATTERY F,
FIRST RHODE ISLAND LIGHT ARTILLERY,
IN NORTH CAROLINA.

BY

PHILIP S. CHASE,

[Late Second Lieutenant Battery F, Rhode Island Light Artillery.

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[Edition limited to two hundred and fifty copies.]

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January 1, 1863, the troops in and around Newbern, North Carolina, were enjoying a season of quiet in their camps, securing the needed rest for both men and horses, after the expedition to Goldsboro during the latter part of the preceding month.

The unsuccessful attempt of General Burnside with the Army of the Potomac to advance at Fredericksburg, and the return of that force to its camps on the north of the Rappahannock, was the principal subject of conversation at this time. Vague rumors reached us that General Burnside was not properly supported by some of his commanding officers, and an almost gloomy feeling seemed to have taken pos-

session of the whole force. General Burnside was loved by the troops in North Carolina, particularly that part of the force which accompanied him on the expedition to that State, and the expression of sympathy was well nigh universal, and in many instances concluded with remarks not complimentary to other officers, believing that jealousy was among the causes of the defeat.

Early in the month, orders were received at Department Headquarters to embark a force to co-operate with the naval forces in an attack upon Wilmington, North Carolina. Belger's Battery was assigned to this force. The pieces were dismounted, and loaded on board a schooner, and thirty-one horses put on another schooner. Lieutenant William A. Arnold, with a detail of men, accompanied them to Moorehead City, under sail, at which place the remaining officers and men were to join them on their arrival. On the twenty-fifth of January, Lieutenant Thomas Simpson, with forty men, was ordered to Moorehead City, by rail, to disembark the battery and return to Newbern; the horses were left on board and transferred to a battery of the Third

New York Artillery, in exchange for the same number from that command.

Major-General J. G. Foster, in a report to the committee on the conduct of the war, thus writes of this movement : " I received orders from Major General Halleck to co-operate with the naval forces in an attack on Wilmington, North Carolina. All the preparations were completed, and the troops about being embarked at Beaufort, North Carolina, when the news arrived of the foundering of the Monitor, at sea. The loss of this iron-clad, which was the only armored vessel in service, of sufficient light draught to enter the new inlet of Cape Fear river and take up position in reverse of the enemy's batteries on Federal Point, caused a change in the destination of the expedition. I was then ordered to take the expedition to South Carolina, and co-operate with Admiral Du Pont in the projected attack on Charleston, South Carolina.

"Accordingly, the fleet having on board about twelve thousand (12,000) men, the best troops in North Carolina, sailed from Beaufort harbor, North Carolina, on the second of February, 1863. Arriving at

Hilton Head, I paid my respects to Major-General Hunter. I then called on Admiral Du Pont to arrange the plan of the joint attack. The Admiral explained that he could not be ready in less than two weeks, in consequence of having to increase the thickness of the decks of the monitors. I then decided to profit by the delay in obtaining some 100-pound Parrotts for siege guns, and after informing General Hunter of my intention, left for Fortress Monroe for that purpose. After I left, General Hunter issued an order breaking up my organization, and merging my whole force into the small corps commanded by him. He also ordered my personal staff to leave his department forthwith. Under these circumstances I requested and obtained authority from General Halleck to return to North Carolina. The twelve thousand (12,000) picked men that were thus lost to my command were not used with any effect in conjunction with Admiral Du Pont's attack on Charleston; and the expedition thus failed."

The war correspondents' version of the trouble between Generals Hunter and Foster was somewhat

different from the report of General Foster, and short extracts from some of their letters may be of interest here. The New York *Herald* correspondent, under date of Port Royal, South Carolina, February 9, 1863, wrote :

“Foster’s expedition is at a standstill — worse even, for the troops are disembarking from the transports, and taking up their quarters on St. Helena Island. All the mystery which enshrouded the expedition for so many weeks is thus useless, and many days must elapse before anything can be achieved by it. Reports are rife as to disagreements between Generals Hunter and Foster, and it would seem as though the authorities at Washington had re-enacted the Butler-Banks embroglio with still worse results. General Hunter, however, does not seem disposed to leave his department, but as it is clearly impossible for two heads of departments to live amicably in the same locality, one of them vacates and goes North for additional instructions. General Foster leaves to-morrow by the ‘Arago,’ and you must not, therefore, expect to hear anything further from this expedition for at least three weeks to come.”

The same correspondent under date of February 11, 1863, wrote :

"The vessels comprising the expedition which sailed from Beaufort, North Carolina, on the twenty-ninth ult., have lain quietly at anchor in Port Royal harbor ever since their arrival. Up to to-night the troops on board of them have not, in a single instance, reported for duty to General Hunter, in whose department they are located. General Foster, their former commander, followed them hither a few days after their arrival, made an excursion to Warsaw and Ossibau sounds, went on a reconnoitering trip to Folly river, and left yesterday for North Carolina again, having, during his stay, not only failed to report for duty to General Hunter, but, as I learn, having issued an order, just prior to his departure, placing his corps under General Naglee's command, and assuring his troops that his column was in every way distinct and separate from General Hunter's department."

The *Boston Journal* contained the following under date of Moorehead City, February 12, 1863 :

"This morning the steamer 'S. R. Spaulding' came

in from Port Royal with Major-General Foster and staff, who is on his way to Washington to see whether himself or General Hunter shall command the expedition now off the South Carolina coast. General Hunter is commander of that Department, and General Foster is commander of the North Carolina Department. The latter having entered where General Hunter has jurisdiction, the latter, being senior officer also, intends to be commander. General Foster demurs, takes the 'Spaulding,' and steams for headquarters. So the expedition is delayed—so the country suffers—so expectations vanish—so hopes fade.”

After the departure of General Foster for the North, General Hunter issued the following order :

“HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF THE SOUTH, }
 HILTON HEAD, PORT ROYAL, S. C., }
 February 19, 1863. }

“Special Orders, No. 97.

“Two members of General Foster’s staff, now sojourning within the limits of this department, having been engaged in sending North a steamer belonging to this command, and necessary for the operations

about to commence — such steamer being sent away clandestinely, and without the knowledge, consent, or order of the Major-General commanding — and it being found that many, if not all, the members of General Foster's staff have indulged in statements and remarks tending to create disaffection, insubordination and mutiny, it is hereby ordered that all the members of the staff of Major-General John G. Foster, commanding the Department of North Carolina, now within the limits of the Department of the South, shall quit this department by the first steamer going North.

“By command of Major General D. HUNTER,

“CHARLES G. HALPINE,

“Assistant Adjutant General,

“Tenth Army Corps.”

General Hunter issued General Order No. 13, which incorporated the troops from North Carolina as a part of the Tenth Corps, but on the twenty-third of February issued General Order No. 15, paragraph III of which revoked so much of General Order No. 13, as assigned the troops from North Carolina to

the Tenth Army Corps, and they remained a part of the Eighteenth Corps.

The affair was discussed editorially by the leading daily papers in the North, nearly, if not quite, all arguing against the course pursued by General Foster, and yet it does not appear that General Halleck intended the troops from General Foster's Department should be attached to General Hunter's command.

The order to "swap" horses with the New York battery we considered a bad bargain; we always took great pride in the appearance of our horses, and considered them worth, in every respect, much more than the ones we received by the change, but as we were not consulted on the subject or allowed to object, the trade was made.

At that time I held a warrant as Sergeant, but had been acting First Sergeant since the return from the Goldsboro expedition, where First Sergeant Massie was severely wounded. On the eighteenth of February, while on "battery drill," Captain Belger assigned the three ranking non-commissioned officers to the command of sections — platoons under Upton's

tactics — that is, acting as lieutenants. The Captain gave us lively work during that drill, and one of the results of that day's work occurred the next day as follows: The building occupied as barracks for the men was a large two-story house, with a piazza in front, which appeared to have been used in days past as a boarding-house. The front entrance was in the centre, with a large room on each side, that on the right being the Captain's office, and the one on the left the First Sergeant's room. I was sitting in my room after reveille roll-call attending to the duties of the hour, when the Captain walked in. I remember the incident as clearly as if it were but yesterday. Standing a few seconds looking at me he said: "Sergeant, write a recommendation for a commission for yourself, and I will sign it," and without further remark went to his office. After some time spent in anxious thought upon the subject, I ventured to write what I thought to be a good document of the kind wanted, and took it to the Captain; he read it through, and without a word of comment tore it into small pieces, and throwing it away, said: "I will write it myself." The recommendation was for-

warded to Rhode Island, and in course of time a vacancy occurred — Lieutenant William A. Arnold having resigned — and I received an appointment as Second Lieutenant, was assigned to the same battery, and on the seventeenth day of May, 1863, was mustered as such.

February 27th, 1863, the rain fell in torrents, and unfortunately for the troops at Newbern, that was the day assigned for a formal flag raising at General Foster's quarters. As there were no postponements on account of the weather, the ceremonies took place according to programme, which included two salutes by Battery F: the first, a national salute, early in the exercises, and later a Major-General's salute, the whole closing with a review by General Foster. Notwithstanding the weather, every part of the programme was carried out with military precision.

These incidents of flag raisings, salutes, parades, etc., may seem to some, especially those who were attached to the Army of the Potomac, as uncalled for and out of place, considering the duty for which we were called into service, but it must be remem-

bered that the troops at Newbern were performing what might be termed garrison duty in a city taken from the enemy, and even then almost within the enemy's lines, whose *white* inhabitants — those that remained — were not altogether friendly to its occupancy by the United States forces, and without doubt these demonstrations had the effect of proving to them that our troops were well drilled, well disciplined, well equipped, and in every way prepared to defend the Union and the flag we upheld.

From this time until March 6th, 1863, the usual routine of camp duties continued, when, in obedience to orders, the battery left quarters in the early morning to join another expedition into the country. Trenton, North Carolina, was reached at about 10 o'clock, A. M., March 7th; then the command returned a part of the distance and took a road leading towards Wilmington, North Carolina; at about 9 o'clock, P. M., bivouaced at "Young's Cross Roads;" next morning the right section, under command of Lieutenant Simpson, in company with a part of the Third New York Cavalry, proceeded to within nine miles of Jacksonville, North Carolina,

and returned. This expedition remained out five days without meeting the enemy in any considerable force. The battery arrived back in its quarters soon after 4 o'clock, P. M., March 10th. The record says: "No engagements; distance travelled about eighty-five miles."

I suppose these expeditions into the country, without any apparent object in view, were planned for the purpose of ascertaining if any considerable force of the enemy was in our immediate vicinity, and may be looked upon as wise precautions taken by the commanding officers to prevent surprises upon and consequent disaster to our troops; but as I remember the thoughts of an enlisted man at the time, they seemed to be for the sole purpose of reminding us that we were in the field for active duty, and were expected to be marching or fighting most of the time. Undoubtedly they were important for both reasons, as they did prevent the enemy coming upon us unawares, and there might have been danger of our forgetting to a certain extent the active duties required, in the quiet occupancy of comfortable quarters in the city

Early in March, signs of unusual activity within the rebel lines were noticed. The Raleigh (N. C.) *Progress*, (rebel), in its issue of March 1, 1863, had the following: "We are glad to learn that General D. H. Hill passed down on Tuesday to assume the command that has been tendered him in North Carolina, with the headquarters at Goldsboro. We have had vastly too much strategy, too much science, and too much ditching and digging in North Carolina. Had we had less of these and more fighting things might have been better than at present; and as General Hill has established a reputation for being one of the best fighting men in the service, we may expect a change in management, if not a 'change in base' in North Carolina. We do not expect any advance from Newbern for some time to come; but the small force of Yankees at this place will have to make occasional raids to keep themselves employed and to keep our people alarmed and excited. These raids we hope in future will be confined to a very small circle around Newbern, and that if they attempt any extensive depredations they will be promptly met and whipped back. If this is not to

be done, we see no use in keeping any force in North Carolina. There can be no doubt, we think, but General Hill is or soon will be in command below ; and we can promise the people of the State that whatever can be done by him for their relief and protection will be done."

The thirteenth and fourteenth days of March, 1863, were days of excitement in and around Newbern, caused by the appearance of General D. H. Hill, with a force estimated at about sixteen thousand men, in our front. On the thirteenth the pickets on the Trent road were driven in, and troops were sent out from the city to reinforce that point. Battery F was ordered to proceed to Deep Gully, a position near the outpost on this road, arriving there early in the evening of the same day, and remained in position through the night, returning to the city on the morning of the fourteenth.

The enemy advanced on Newbern in three columns ; the main force by the Trent road, which leads direct to the city ; a column by way of Trenton and Pollockville, which approached on our left ; and a column which came down the north bank of the

Neuse river and appeared upon our extreme right. The columns approaching our left and centre made no serious demonstration beyond driving in the pickets; but the column on our right, across the Neuse river, seemed to be charged with the duty of capturing our small force on that side of the river, which, at this time, consisted of the Ninety-second New York Volunteers, about four hundred strong, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson, occupying a small unfinished earthwork. Daylight of the fourteenth found the enemy about four thousand strong, with eighteen pieces of artillery in position, under command of General Pettigrew, before this earthwork. General Pettigrew sent a summons to Colonel Anderson to surrender, saying that he had a large force prepared to reduce the work, but to avoid unnecessary destruction of life he would give an opportunity to capitulate, which magnanimous offer was refused, and he opened fire. This day was the first anniversary of the capture of Newbern by General Burnside, and undoubtedly the time was chosen with reference to that fact. We had no artillery on that side of the river, but a New York bat-

tery of heavy guns was placed in position on the opposite bank within easy range of Pettigrew's troops. The gunboat "Hunchback" ran up the river and trained her guns upon the enemy. The Ninety-second New York remained under cover of the earthwork, protected from the fire of Pettigrew's guns, prepared to repel an assault should one be made.

During the morning a force of infantry was successfully sent across the river, and the fire from the gunboat and battery proving too much for the endurance of Pettigrew's troops, he withdrew. The destruction of life which he was anxious to avoid, occurred entirely within his own command, and the only casualties on our side were two men of the Ninety-second New York, wounded.

Thus ended very unexpectedly what promised to be a determined effort to recover Newbern to Confederate control, and to drive the Union troops from the shores of North Carolina.

It would appear that the enemy in our front and left were waiting for the success of General Pettigrew on our right, and had he been successful in capturing the small force of infantry in his front, or

driving them across the river, the result might have been very different, for with a large force well supplied with artillery, posted on the east bank of the Neuse river, the city could have been easily shelled, and although the crossing of the river would have been very difficult, and it is doubtful if with the force at his command it could have been done, the effect would have been to draw troops from our front to prevent the crossing, thus weakening the lines and making a direct attack on that point more sure of success.

Upon the failure of General Pettigrew, the enemy withdrew from around Newbern, and their next movement was upon Washington, North Carolina.

The prophecy of the Raleigh *Progress* seemed to be correct. General Hill had inaugurated offensive operations in North Carolina, and our troops were put upon the defensive for the time being, although the campaign was of short duration.

March 30th, the enemy appeared before Washington, N. C., and commenced a siege of the place. Communication was entirely cut off, and General Foster, with a force of about twelve hundred men,

consisting of the Twenty-seventh and Forty-fourth Massachusetts Infantry, a part of the Third New York Artillery, and Third New York Cavalry, and the First North Carolina Volunteers, were completely shut in with a small supply of ammunition and rations. I believe there were one or more gunboats in front of the town, which were also shut in.

Washington, North Carolina, is situated on the Pamlico river, near the mouth of the Tar river, distant from Newbern by land from twenty-five to thirty miles, and by water something over one hundred miles. Several strong batteries on the banks of the river below the town, together with a barricade across the channel, effectually prevented the passage of gunboats or supply vessels to the relief of the little garrison, so it was thought, but subsequent events caused a change of opinion on that point.

April 8th, a comparatively small force, under the command of Brigadier-General T. B. Spinola, left Newbern to march overland to the relief of General Foster, and by attacking the enemy in the rear, raise the siege and liberate the garrison. Battery F accompanied this command. The troops met with

no resistance until on the ninth of April, Blount's creek, a stream sufficiently large to require a bridge for crossing, was reached. Here the enemy were found with artillery posted to resist further advance. As our advance reached this bridge, it was found to have been rendered impassible by removing the plank flooring, and a halt at once took place. I remember the road we were on lay through a heavily wooded country, and when the battery, which was near the right, halted, there was no position to be seen sufficiently open for artillery maneuvering. We were directed to open fire, and Captain Belger ordered "action left," as we stood in the road. While the Captain was superintending the movements of the first piece, accompanied by myself — being First Sergeant at the time — and the two buglers, and before a shot had been fired by us, he was severely wounded in the thigh by a ball from a case shot from the enemy's guns, which exploded directly in our front, killing the Captain's horse and two battery horses. This shot was the first from the enemy, and I think the result was not proof of proficiency on the part of the gunner, but rather a chance shot, for no other

during the hour which we were engaged did us any damage. In a very short time, considering the nature of the ground upon which we were, our guns were at work, and for an hour fired at, we did not know what, as nothing could be seen but woods. For a time, however, the shell and case shot which passed over our heads, and exploded in the woods in our rear, assured us that an enemy was somewhere in our front. I noticed but few troops pass to the front or right of our position in which direction the bridge lay, and if an effort was made to cross the bridge it must have been quickly abandoned, as the enemy's fire having ceased, we were ordered to cease firing and retire. Of course being an enlisted man, I was not in possession of that knowledge of the situation which the commanding general was supposed to have, but it seemed to me, and was freely talked among the men of the battery, that had the attempt been pushed, as it should have been, the result might have been different.

The return march commenced immediately, and at 4 o'clock, P. M., April 10th, we arrived at our quarters in Newbern with no other loss than that men-

tioned above. After Captain Belger had been placed in an ambulance and taken a short distance to the rear, I stripped his horse of its equipments, placed them in a baggage-wagon, and when the firing ceased, rode back to see if the Captain was comfortable. I found him stretched out in the ambulance, and upon inquiry as to his condition, was greeted with the reply, "The —— cusses have got my horse," a spirited animal, prized very highly. I assured him his horse was dead, "dead as a door nail." He then said, "Well, they have got my equipments," and not until I had explained to him that the equipments were safe, did he reply to my inquiry. Evidently he had been imagining, as he lay helpless in the ambulance, his favorite horse, well equipped, being ridden by some confederate officer, and the thought was troubling him more at that moment than his own condition.

The official report of the operations of the battery on this expedition, made by First Lieutenant Thomas Simpson, who succeeded Captain Belger in command, states that during the engagement on the ninth, "three hundred and two (302) rounds of

ammunition, principally case shot and shell," were expended.

The next movement for the relief of the garrison at Washington, occurred on the night of April 12th, when the steam transport "Escort," with the Fifth Rhode Island Volunteers on board, and a supply of ammunition and stores, ran the batteries on the river, and arrived safely at the wharf in Washington without loss. On the 14th, General Foster returned with the same steamer by daylight. In passing the batteries on the return trip, the steamer received forty-seven shots, losing the pilot, killed, and seven of the crew killed or wounded.

Referring to the attempt of General Spinola to reinforce General Foster or raise the siege, a report was printed in the New York *Tribune*, on the authority of a "gentleman who came from Newbern, a passenger on board the 'Mary Sanford,' that about fifty men of one of the Rhode Island batteries, who were with him, had volunteered to take the Rebel battery, and were about to do it, when one of General Spinola's aids rode up with peremptory order to retreat." Of course we do not know the name of

the gentleman, and cannot learn how he became possessed of so much knowledge, but I feel bound to state, in the interest of truth, that no Rhode Island artillery men volunteered to perform such duty, however brave and patriotic such action might have been. The men of the battery, except the sergeants, who carried sabres, were not armed, and it would have been a novel sight in war for fifty unarmed men to storm a battery in broad daylight.

General Foster arrived in Newbern from Washington, N. C., by the steamer "Escort," on the 14th of April, and on the 17th, with the force that could be collected in and around Newbern, amounting to about ten thousand men, started to return overland to the relief of the garrison, and to raise the siege. Battery F accompanied the expedition, being assigned to General Heckman's brigade. The command marched over the same route as was taken by General Spinola the previous week. On the 18th of April we arrived at Blount's Creek, found the bridge unprotected, and signs that the enemy were in full retreat, having abandoned the attempt to capture Washington and the small force defending it, as

they did the similar attempt upon Newbern the previous month, although a much more determined effort was made at the former place. After a short delay to repair the bridge over the creek, and render it passable for the troops, the force pushed forward, arriving at Washington during the afternoon of the 19th. The Battery remained outside until the 21st, when it entered the town. The enemy had entirely disappeared, evidently abandoning the siege, upon discovering that an unarmed wooden transport could safely pass their batteries on the banks of the Pamlico river, which were thought to have been an effectual blockade.

The Battery remained at Washington until April 28th, when it returned to its quarters at Newbern by transport, arriving soon after midnight, having been absent twelve days. I am not competent to criticise the movements of either side during the campaign which commenced early in March, with the attempt to capture Newbern, and which ended on the 19th of April, when the enemy had retreated and disappeared from before Washington. The slight losses of men and material would seem to indicate that the

movements of both armies were easily resisted ; that there was a lack of that persistence which insured success ; and compared with the desperate encounters of the later campaigns of the war, were not much more than skirmishes.

The health of the men continued good, six only being absent sick, one of whom had not recovered from wounds received in December previous.

The alterations and casualties in the battery during the four months covered by this paper, left the aggregate of commissioned officers one more, and enlisted men four less, than it was on the first day of January, 1863, and is accounted for as follows : Second Lieutenant Albert E. Adams, whose appointment dated December 4, 1862, joined for duty January 5, 1863. Four enlisted men were discharged ; two to accept promotion, viz. : First Sergeant Alexander M. Massie, as Second Lieutenant in the Third Regiment, Rhode Island Heavy Artillery, subsequently transferred to the Veteran Reserve Corps, and Quartermaster Sergeant Walter M. Knight, as Second Lieutenant, Battery H, First Rhode Island Light Artillery ; and two on Surgeon's certificate of dis-

ability, viz.: privates John Wood, at Newbern, January 14th, 1863, and Philip L. Bassett, at Annapolis, Md., December 2, 1862, information of which was received at the battery February 10, 1863. There was no gain during this period, consequently the strength of the battery April 30th, as appears upon the monthly return bearing that date, was five commissioned officers, and one hundred and thirty-four enlisted men, with six twelve-pounder Napoleon guns—light twelves we called them—caissons, etc., complete, and one hundred and two horses. An addition of sixteen enlisted men would have given the maximum number allowed.

